THE CHRISTIAN AS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

By

SIR EVELYN WRENCH
C.M.G., LL.D.

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NOTE

THIS paper reproduces Sir Evelyn Wrench's talk in the recent B.B.C. series: "God and the World through Christian Eyes."

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THE CHRISTIAN AS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

THIS is one of the concluding talks on "God and the World Through Christian Eyes," and in many ways I think it is one of the most important in the series—the Christian's attitude towards his own nation and towards the world as a whole. When I decided, a year ago, to accept the B.B.C.'s invitation to give the talk, I did so because I thought that perhaps I had a message to give.

Twenty-three years ago I went through a very real spiritual experience, which divided my life into two halves. The Vision that I saw, the voices that I heard, in whatever way I may try to express the inexpressible, were to me the most real experience I have ever had in my life. Before that day I thought in terms of self, of ambition, of my career; of ambition for my own country as opposed to other countries. In life's race I wanted to be in one of the first places, in the world struggle I wanted my country to be the richest, most powerful, largest, greatest, the envy of the rest of the world.

For a moment that day my eyes pierced through the veil. I can remember my experience as if it were yesterday. It was in Westminster Abbey. I was

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listening to the organ. Suddenly the scales fell from my eyes; I was spiritually re-born. I started life again with a new code, a new set of values, a new vision of what the world might be. I only speak of this personal experience because I think that perhaps it qualifies me to speak to you on a subject which is to me sacred, the Unity of Mankind.

Humanity is certainly going through a "Slough of Despond" at the present time. So many people who are working for international co-operation must often be heavy of heart. I am sure I am, frequently. It is so easy to drop one's eyes from the mountain top and allow the dust of living to envelop one. There are doubts and difficulties at every stage of the way. It is so very easy to look down and not up, to look inward and not outward and upward to the Cross—the beacon of hope—which has stood there for nineteen hundred years for those that have eyes to see.

We are living in an age when in many countries large sections of people are extolling values, which to the Christian must seem the antithesis of Christ's teaching. The doctrine that might be right, that one should love oneself and not one's neighbour, that for nations there is only one law, the law of the jungle, that the laws of right and wrong governing individual conduct do not apply to nations. There are false prophets who seek to divide nations and races into arbitrary categories. Just as in the war we divided recruits into A, B, and C categories, so we are asked in the present year of grace to divide

the world into first-class, second-class, and third-class nations. And even if such a division were justifiable biologically, who is to decide which nation is to belong to which group? False doctrines; for we are not considering the breeding of animals for a fat-stock show, we are considering immortal man. Many of the greatest deeds in the world have been performed by human beings with C_3 bodies. That is one of the great compensations of life; the human being with a suffering or ill-developed body probably contains—nay, often does contain—a great heart and a great soul.

But to return to our present-day world. Many of our troubles are due to a wrong attitude to life. We give lip-service to ideals of peace and co-operation with our neighbours, but in our hearts we are still unrepentant individualists. The gods of self and national advantage occupy the shrines in our sanctuary. We regard the world through spectacles of self. How will it affect me, *my* family, *my* country, not how will it affect my neighbour. And then we are surprised that humanity is passing through a tunnel, to which there seems no end.

We are like Christian in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. You remember that Christian could not get out of the Slough of Despond. We too have a burden—a burden of national hate, of contempt for our neighbours whose religious or political views are not our own, of a superiority complex towards other nations that differ in race or colour from our own. You recollect that it was not till Christian saw the

Cross that the burden rolled off his back. How are we to see Christ, to stamp the vision of Christ on the Cross on our hearts? That is the world's greatest problem to-day. We must set a new standard in our attitude to the world, *the Christ standard*. In all humbleness, on our knees, every day of our lives, we ought to pray that we too may see the vision, and, once seen, retain it in our hearts.

When I was a boy I remember being given a book called *In His Steps*. Its message, often crudely expressed, was "What would Jesus do?" Often in after life I have wished that I had asked myself that question before starting out on every new undertaking. What a transformed world it would be if that question were ever ready on our lips. What would our Lord do? What would He do here and now in this distraught world?

Down through the ages there has been a company of rare souls who have tried to set their course on the sea of life by that Compass. In each succeeding century there have been those who have claimed that the message of Christianity was out of date, that Christ's teaching, addressed to the simple peasants and fisher-folk of Galilee, did not apply to the age in which they lived. And time after time they have proved to be wrong. Christ's teaching is eternal. It is as applicable to our problems to-day as when it was uttered nineteen hundred years ago. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"—seven words which contain the answer to most of life's riddles. In these words I see the only salvation of mankind.

My talk is called, as you will have noticed, "The Christian as National and International." I will now ask you for a few minutes to consider our duties as patriots. How far does the doctrine of World Unity, in which I believe, enable you and me to be first of all good citizens of our own land? We have a series of loyalties and obligations in our lives, and provided they are the right kind of loyalties, they need not conflict, rather they should dovetail the one into the other.

We start off with the unit of the family; we have got very definite duties to our own family. Family life is, after all, at the heart of our conception of existence. We have also a local patriotism or loyalty to the town or district in which we live. I live in Chelsea; therefore the first duty that occurs to me is to Chelsea. I am a Londoner by adoption; therefore my next duty is to London. So far, none of these allegiances are conflicting. Each of them covers one sphere of existence. There are several further allegiances, to one's university, to one's club, to the various societies and associations to which each one of us belongs.

And before turning to national obligations, there is the supreme loyalty as Christians to our religion. *Loyalty to Christ is the essential.* I hope I shall not hurt any susceptibilities when I repeat that to me the great essential seems to be that we should be followers of Christ, the actual form of our discipleship is of lesser importance. Many paths lead up the mountain. One path suits my neighbour, another I

prefer, but they meet on the summit. I almost wish I had been asked to talk to you this evening on the Vision of Christian Unity. It is a wonderful theme. Some day the world will be ready for it, but I fear that day is not yet. But we can hasten on the day by emphasizing the things that *unite* Christians, rather than the things that divide them. Anyhow, to whatever Church we belong, we have duties, and they do not, or should not, conflict with our duties as citizens of our country.

We now come to our national patriotism. Of course, it is our duty to love our own country and work for its welfare, to want it to be the most ideal, the holiest, the wisest, the best—in every sense—country in the world, inhabited by spiritually developed, characterful, healthy, happy, and good citizens. We want it to be a really useful member of the family of nations, making its contribution to the common good which no other nation can make. National individuality is a precious possession not to be discarded. Our domestic patriotism implies that we *do* seek to love our neighbour—our fellow-citizen—as ourselves, that we know we are our brother's keeper, that our country is not worthy of itself so long as there remains a single slum in our midst, so long as there is a single human being suffering from under-nourishment or from ill-health, due to preventable causes. No patriot can complain that such a programme will not give us, of this generation, plenty of scope. Our patriotism will imply a deep sense of past failings and an over-

whelming desire to build a new Jerusalem in our own dear country.

But we of the British Commonwealth have another loyalty, to the British Empire as a whole. If we had been born in Sweden or Switzerland, we would be just good Swedish or Swiss patriots and our national loyalties would end there. Not so with us. We find ourselves members of a world state consisting of eighty parts of the world around the seven seas, inhabited by every creed, colour, and class. In many ways the British Commonwealth is man's greatest political achievement. It is a stupendous factor in the world. If it were to break up civilization would probably be set back many years. We as Britons, inhabiting this little island in the North Atlantic, are one of the partner-states in this great political system. We have two very definite patriotic duties, therefore, firstly to our own island—to Great Britain—and secondly to the British Commonwealth. Both these loyalties should dovetail into one another. The better citizen of his country a man is, the better citizen he will be of the Commonwealth as a whole. There should be nothing incompatible between any of our loyalties and duties, to our family, town, county, club, school, association, to our country and our group of countries—in our case the British Empire as a whole—of which the King is the head and symbol of unity.

Now let me begin my talk about the Christian as International by asking you to consider three other loyalties that we have. We are Europeans, we belong

to Europe just as much as we belong to Great Britain. I think one of the greatest needs of the present age is to create a European loyalty, a European patriotism, a love for Mother Europe, of which we are all citizens. I am convinced that if we are to emerge from our present difficulties, we must sooner or later create a United States of Europe, but before we are ready for so great a change, we must create a sense of European citizenship in the individual. Ten months ago I gave a talk on the wireless in which I stated my views as to the future organization of Europe and how, as Britons, our loyalties to the British Empire and to Europe would have to fit in. To-night I can only repeat that I see no reason why Great Britain cannot fulfil a dual rôle as partner in the British Commonwealth and as a member of the European family.

In this talk I am keeping to broad principles and I am endeavouring to point out the goal towards which we should direct our feet. I can hear a listener say: "Will you please define in greater detail what should be our future attitude towards the British Commonwealth and the United States of Europe respectively?" a perfectly legitimate question and one which I would seek to answer fully had I the time. All I can say in passing is that each nation in the British Empire has treaties and tariff agreements with the Powers with which it comes into contact; first of all it considers its internal domestic interests, secondly its dealings with

members of the Empire, thirdly with nations with whom it has special ties, and fourthly with the world at large. When the time comes for the creation of a United States of Europe we shall likewise have a series of obligations: (1) to ourselves; (2) to the Empire; (3) to the United States of Europe; (4) to the world at large. Naturally these various interests will have to be discussed and adjusted. But life is a continuous process of adjustment. Each country in the modern world has a long list of treaties with other nations; these are constantly being revised and added to. But I must pass on.

Our next loyalty, to which I have not referred so far, is to our racial or linguistic group, in our case the English-speaking world. This loyalty is *not* a political loyalty, it is a cultural loyalty, it implies that Britons and Americans have certain common ties which bind them very closely together—ties of a common speech, a common literature, and a common legal system. In the same way there must always be special cultural ties between certain groups of nations—for instance, between the Spanish-speaking, French-speaking, and German-speaking groups.

And now let me turn to our ultimate loyalty—our allegiance to the world as a whole. We as Christians must never for a moment forget that World Unity is the goal. Sooner or later that objective must be reached. Each one of the loyalties I have referred to must fit an ultimate Federation of Mankind. If our civic and national patriotisms are of the right

kind, they will be sections of a perfect whole. In the shaping of the new world of our dreams Christians have a great part to play. To them the unity of mankind should be no idle dream. "We are members one of another," humanity is *one*. We are members of one body and the body needs each member. Hands, feet, eyes, ears—one and all are needed to make a perfect whole. Each race and nation is needed to make the world complete. We do not want a dull uniformity. Just because modern science has largely overcome barriers of space, it is very desirable that we should cling to our national culture, our national art, our national dress, our national folk-lore. Humanity is greatly enriched by the individuality of each unit. But just because we admit the need of cultural patriotism, that must not blind us to the need of never forgetting that the political goal is a world state.

The citizens of the British Empire should very readily grasp the conception of World Unity. The outlook of an Elizabethan Englishman was totally different from that of the present-day Englishman. Each lived in a small island, in that one respect their environment was alike. But the present-day Briton, apart from his local national duties to Great Britain, is the citizen of a world Empire occupying a fifth of the globe. World Unity is, therefore, *already in existence* among a quarter of the human race. In that vast area the thought of war has been abolished. If Australia and Great Britain, or Canada and Australia, had a dispute, there would be no recourse

to arms. Pax Britannica is a very real political fact in the world. They would refer their disputes to arbitration with the knowledge that justice would be done.

The task which confronts us is how to create a world state, consisting of all nations and peoples, among the remaining three-quarters of the human race. The British Empire has demonstrated that it is possible to unite alien peoples belonging to every race, colour, and creed, under one rule, where justice will prevail, over a vast territory scattered round the globe, from which all thought of war has been banished. The success of the British experiment is an object-lesson to mankind. In the British Commonwealth the two apparent opposites of independence and co-operation have been reconciled. In the future United States of the world, the British Commonwealth must play an important part.

One of the enigmas of history is why such extreme national feeling should exist in Christian nations, in view of the fact that the Christian religion is essentially international. For Christ's teaching before everything else was international. The Founder of Christianity preached brotherhood: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations"; and also, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth"; and again, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." The early Church stood for the breaking down of barriers. St. Paul, once he had seen the vision on

the way to Damascus, spent himself to the utmost in preaching the new dispensation to *all* peoples. Every race and colour was welcome in the new religion. You and I, as Christians, have a clear and definite duty, the duty of trying with everything in us to advance the cause of the brotherhood of man. We want some of that fire of St. Paul's which largely built up the Christian Church. The whole history of humanity would have been different if St. Paul had not seen the heavenly vision and been obedient unto it.

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you." Our Lord's command is perfectly definite. He adds no qualifying conditions. We are not to ascertain first if our neighbour believes in the same creeds as we do, if his skin is the same colour as ours, if his country is a member of the group of countries to which we belong, if he is an Aryan or Caucasian, Gentile or Jew. His commandment was quite clear: "That ye love one another as I have loved you." Many people regard our Lord's utterances as a counsel of perfection, not applicable to the workaday world. Suppose they were so practical that the only way the world could exist in peace were by applying them to everyday life. I submit that until we apply this great central doctrine of Christ's reaching, there will be no end to our woes.

I sometimes wonder whether we must not have a new Crusade—a new World Peace Crusade—with all the fervour which Wesley employed in the

eighteenth century, or with the burning fire of the religious leaders in the Middle Ages. We need a new St. Francis to shake us from our complacency. Surely there are enough people of goodwill in all countries to make possible the raising of a great Peace Army, the members of which would pledge themselves to love their neighbours as themselves. Why does the cause of Peace make such slow headway? Is it that a Peace Crusade is less picturesque than a War Crusade? We shall not capture the public imagination in our Peace Crusade, our Crusade for World Unity, till we employ the same methods that have been used by all successful leaders of great movements.

Armistice Day will be with us in six days' time. Can we not make Armistice Day not only a day of remembrance for the great hosts of departed in all countries, but a day of consecration of ourselves to the cause of Peace? Can we not take a solemn vow that, with God's help, we will devote the rest of our lives to furthering the cause of World Peace? How better could we remember the deeds of those who gave their lives for the war to end war?

Let me leave with you two definite thoughts to-night. The knowledge that we have two allegiances—apart from many others, to some of which I have not referred—to the British Commonwealth and to the world. These two loyalties need not conflict. And the second thought I would ask you to consider is whether there is any greater task for Christians at the present time than working for

the cause of World Peace. The two things go side by side, World Unity and World Peace. Christians cannot hesitate when they hear the call to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

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